

## ***Section 1***



## **THE CHULA VISTA SETTING FOR THE ARTS**

**ARTS MASTER PLAN - DRAFT**



The visual and performing arts in Chula Vista have been and will be influenced by the context in which they are created. Particularly important contextual elements for the arts in Chula Vista include the City's natural, historical, regional and developmental settings.

## **NATURAL SETTING**

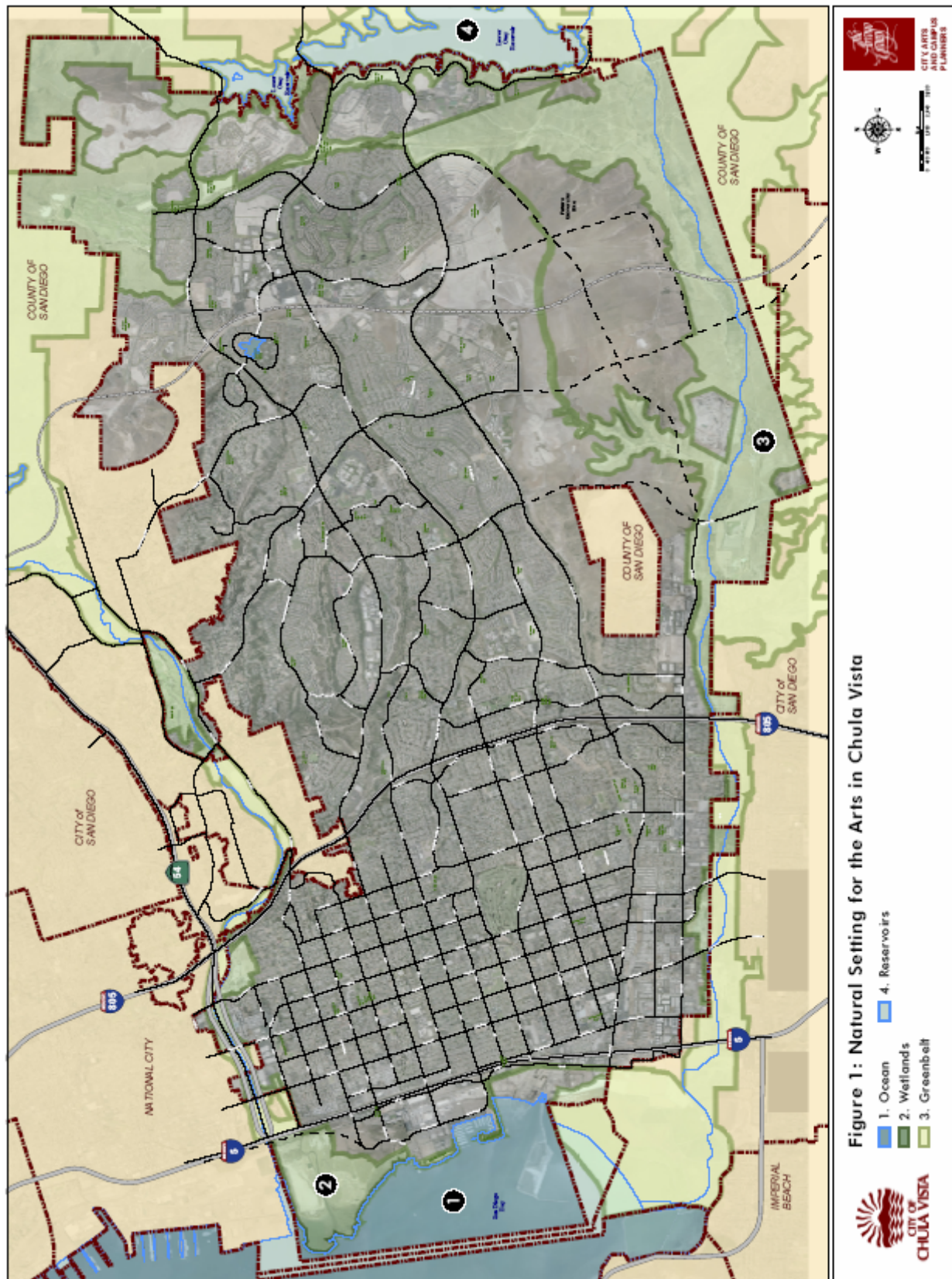
Chula Vista, prior to a substantial amount of habitation, was a desert environment at the edge of a great bay. As the Sweetwater River wove its way through Chula Vista, it deposited the sediments that created the Sweetwater wetlands.

The Sweetwater Marsh National Wildlife Refuge, the largest tract of preserved wetlands in the South Bay, is home to more than 200 birds and a variety of endangered species. The nationally-recognized Chula Vista Nature Center is located within the Refuge, and provides local nature programs and exhibits for children and adults.

The hills surrounding Chula Vista are comprised of coastal sage scrub plant communities, which are found along the California coast from San Francisco to San Diego. Plants in this community include low-growing species such as Sage Brush. The coastal sage environment is an important component of the local ecology of Chula Vista.

The natural environment of Chula Vista has been altered by irrigation systems constructed to support both agriculture and the development of new communities. Yet the desert environment, ocean, wetlands, animals, plants and birds have and will continue to inspire the arts and artists of Chula Vista. Artists and their arts can relate to these elements by creating individual expressions and interpretations of local flora and fauna, as well as creating responses to Chula Vista's ocean, wetlands and coastal sage setting.

*Figure 1 illustrates the major components of the natural environment that remain in Chula Vista today, including the bay, the Sweetwater Marsh National Wildlife Refuge, the Otay reservoirs, and the southerly greenbelt. This greenbelt, as defined in the Chula Vista General Plan, will provide a continuous corridor of undeveloped open space which will preserve a natural environment for the City and provide hiking connections from the reservoirs to the wildlife refuge. The hills located to the east of the reservoirs also provide an appealing visual backdrop for Chula Vista.*



## **HISTORICAL SETTING**

History creates a sense of place and identity for everyday life and a context for the arts. The Chula Vista Heritage Museum has created “A Brief History of Chula Vista,” which describes the major eras in Chula Vista’s history.

The following is an overview of Chula Vista’s history, as described in this exhibit.

### *3000 BC – EARLIEST INHABITANTS*

Nomadic Yuman-speaking Indians first migrated into the area now known as Chula Vista about 5,000 years ago, around the same time that construction of Stonehenge began in England. The natives subsisted on a diet of fish, small game, and a variety of wild seeds, berries and nuts—especially the acorn which became their main staple. Descendants of these original inhabitants are known today as the Kumeyaay Indians.

### *1769 – SPANISH MISSIONARIES ARRIVE*

While several Spanish ships had previously sailed into San Diego Bay, white settlement didn’t begin in the region until Father Junipero Serra led a party of missionaries and soldiers north across the present-day border of Mexico. On July 1, 1769, they traveled through Chula Vista and established the first of a string of 21 California missions in San Diego. The missionaries dramatically changed the Indians’ way of life by imposing a feudal “serf” system and using them to grow crops. “El Rancho del Rey” (the King’s Ranch), which encompassed the Chula Vista region, was used to graze their horses and cattle.

### *1821 – MEXICAN RULE AND LAND GRANTS*

The Spanish empire in the new world crumbled which left California to be governed by the newly established country of Mexico. Under Mexican rule, the mission system was secularized—control was seized from the Catholic Church and favored citizens were given large land grants including several near Chula Vista. In 1845, California Governor Pio Pico gave “El Rancho del Rey” to John Forster, his brother-in-law, and it was renamed “Rancho de la Nación” (the National Ranch)

### *1850 – CALIFORNIA BECOMES A US TERRITORY*

California became a U.S. territory following the Mexican-American War in 1847. Only one year after the gold rush of 1849, California became a state. Most of the land grants that were established under Mexican rule were allowed to continue as private property although the U.S. required proof of ownership. While John Forster kept his land in the Chula Vista region, it took him a number of years to verify ownership using such informal methods as witness accounts and scraps of paper.

### *1868 -RAILROAD RELATED DEVELOPMENT*

Entrepreneurs Frank, Warren and Levi Kimball bought “Rancho de la Nación” for \$30,000. To increase the value of their investment, Frank Kimball successfully lobbied

the Santa Fe Railway to build a line to National City, just north of Chula Vista. In exchange for its investment, Kimball gave the railroad almost 40 percent of his holdings and that 10,000 acres encompassed the entire area that became Chula Vista. With that incentive, the railroad formed a subsidiary called the San Diego Land and Town Company and made plans to develop Chula Vista.

#### *1887 – CHULA VISTA IS PLANNED*

Colonel William Dickinson, one of the Santa Fe Railway's town planners, was hired to plan the new community of Chula Vista. The first tract was subdivided into five-acre lots, which initially were sold for \$1,500 with the requirement that the owners build an orchard house and plant citrus trees. Developers of the region also anticipated that this agricultural adventure would need a reliable source of water. At the same time lots were being sold by the San Diego Land and Town Company, the railroad financed construction of the Sweetwater Dam. Soon Chula Vista proclaimed itself the "Lemon Capital of the World" and by 1898 the community had 60,000 lemon trees and two packinghouses.

#### *1911 – CHULA VISTA GROWS*

Chula Vista continued to grow both in size and prestige, and by 1911 its amenities included a bank, post office, school, library, hospital, yacht club, churches and more. Its citizens voted to incorporate the 5.3-square-mile community. Unfortunately early years of prosperity were followed by two years of drought in 1914-15, then disastrous rains in early 1916 sent floodwaters through the earth abutments at Sweetwater Dam and broke the Otay Dam to the south of Chula Vista. Many agricultural assets were destroyed and an undocumented number of lives were lost.

#### *1916 – CHULA VISTA HELPS FIGHT WORLD WAR I*

At the beginning of World War I, the Hercules Powder Company opened a factory along the bay in Chula Vista to extract certain chemicals from kelp—a type of seaweed. The company combined these chemicals to make an explosive used by the British for fuses during the war and offered employment to more than 1,500 residents. After the war the plant was closed but to this day the site is still frequently referred to as Gunpowder Point.

#### *1941- CHULA VISTA HELPS FIGHT WORLD WAR II*

Just months before the attack on Pearl Harbor, Fred Rohr moved his fledgling aircraft company to Chula Vista. Rohr Aircraft manufactured ready-to-install engine units for military and civilian aircraft, and at the height of its World War II production employed 9,000 workers. As a result, several massive temporary housing projects were built where orchards once stood. These changes signaled the eventual end of Chula Vista's rural lifestyle. In the 1990s Rohr was bought by BF Goodrich.

#### *1985 – CHULA VISTA ANNEXES HISTORIC OTAY AND GROWS EAST*

Two factors during this decade brought tremendous growth in Chula Vista. The former Montgomery Fire Protection District, that included the historic Otay community, voted in

favor of annexation bringing more than 25,000 new residents to Chula Vista. In addition, the city annexed the first of several large parcels of land to the east (encompassing parts of “El Rancho del Rey” and other original land grants) and approved its first master planned community—EastLake. Other master planned communities would soon follow, including the launch of Otay Ranch in 1993.

Artists and their arts can continue to draw inspiration from the rich and unique history of Chula Vista.



*Figure 2 – Historical Setting for the Arts in Chula Vista depicts these eras.*